



Office of Management's Monthly Newsletter

The Beacon

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Office of Management
Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

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bea-con (bê' ken) *noun*

A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or

RON'S CORNER

Earth Day 2000

by Ron Hicks
Deputy Administrator
Office of Management
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Saturday, April 2, 2000 marks the 30th Anniversary of the first Earth Day and over 500 million people around the world are expected to participate in Earth Day 2000 events during the month of April. In the U.S., most major cities and thousands of smaller communities will host Earth Day activities. Earth Day has always been about everyday people taking action in their own communities for a cleaner, healthier environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the White House's Council on Environmental Quality help to promote Earth Day events throughout the U.S.

There are many positive steps that FSIS employees can follow at work to help protect our resources for future generations. Among these are:

- Use recycled paper for printing and double-side copying;
- Turn off your office lights at the end of each day;
- Participate in your work location's recycling program for paper, glass, aluminum, etc.;

- Maximize the use of equipment that meets EPA's EnergyStar standards;
- Keep your automobile in peak operating condition;
- Use electronic means (e-mail) to communicate; and
- Recycle your ink jet printer cartridges. (See the following article).

This is only a representative list of the things that you can do to show your support for Earth Day. Many local communities are organizing Earth Day events. You can visit the EPA website (www.epa.gov) or contact Kevin Dressman (Outlook or telephone 301-504-4247) about FSIS environmental initiatives or to offer your suggestion.

Mailers for Recycled Inkjet Cartridges

by Pete Bridgeman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4222

Several field employees have recognized the potential for recycling the large volume of inkjet printer cartridges used by FSIS. In Fiscal Year 1999, we sent out a total 5,110 Print Cartridges to inspectors in the field. Therefore, we are in the process of obtaining a large supply of Business Reply, Postage Paid Mailers for sending used inkjet cartridges to an agency of the President's Committee for the Blind and Severely Disabled (NISH) for recycling. We hope to have these available by next month and will include information for obtaining

them from Landover. We will also be asking Landover to include one or two mailers in each order for print cartridges, so you can just drop your used cartridge in the mailer when you replace it with the new one you receive from Landover. In most cases, you will be able to fit more than one cartridge in each mailer. We are excited about the environmental impact of recycling this many cartridges, and NISH is excited about receiving all of these cartridges to be recycled.

Once these are made available, we would like to encourage all of our employees to take advantage of this opportunity to both help the environment and support NISH's efforts to provide opportunities to the disabled through cartridge recycling.

Deborah Matz, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration and the USDA Environmental Executive supports FSIS's latest environmental initiative: "*We have an incredible opportunity before us. We use and throw away empty ink jet cartridges -- thinking of them as trash rather than resources.* USDA

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has partnered with NISH to change this paradigm and recycle the cartridges to create job opportunities for persons with disabilities. NISH gains an inventory of empty cartridges for re-filling. People with disabilities get jobs, learn new skills, and gain self-esteem. Join this effort -- recycle your ink jet cartridges into jobs."

Stay tuned for more details on how to get your mailers!

Processing and Slaughter Plant Visits Enlighten ASD Employees

by Corinne Calhoun
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4233

Editor's Note: To provide better service to FSIS, a meat and poultry plant orientation program has been initiated for Administrative Services Division employees. A report on the first trip follows.

Ever wonder how the frozen foods that you purchase at your local supermarket are prepared, seasoned, and packaged? Well, the answers to all your questions may be found at the Townsend Culinary II, Inc., processing plant in Laurel, MD, where two groups of FSIS' Administrative Services Division employees recently toured.

At Townsend Culinary, you will find everything from 400-pound meat marinating machines to people who perform taste tests to make sure that the processed food will satisfy the taste buds. This plant is a little different than most meat processing plants because Townsend Culinary processes not only meats, but also other foods that are prepared primarily for public schools, restaurants such as Au Bon Pain, and grocery stores for consumers. "The whole experience was interesting to me," said Shaina Fisher of ASD. "I never knew how frozen foods were prepared."

The USDA donates meat nationally that is used for the School Lunch

Program. USDA graders are at the plant at all times to certify that only stamped, USDA-donated meat is used for the processing of school lunches. The meat is tested for metal at least twice before it is certified for use.

ASD employees learned how ingredients and spices for soups and sauces are cooked in 250-gallon kettles, bagged, sealed, and inserted into "tumbler-chiller" machines, where they are cooled before being packaged and shipped. Some also saw a CO2 machine freeze meatballs for the school lunch program, taking them to a temperature of -75 degrees within minutes of being baked.

Sanitation and safety are first and foremost at Townsend Culinary. Plant employees must constantly sanitize their hands and walk through a sanitizing solution before entering certain areas to prevent the transfer of germs. Emergency shower and eye wash facilities are available for employees throughout the plant in case of any accidental chemical contact. "It's kind of like a big version of your kitchen at home," said FSIS Consumer Safety Inspector Fred Tancordo.

A few ASD employees even learned what happens to the meat before it reaches processing plants when they toured the J. W. Treuth and Sons, Inc., kosher slaughter plant (Est. 2612) in suburban Ellicott City, MD. These individuals witnessed the slaughter and inspection process first-hand as they watched the plant employees handle cattle brought to the plant from various regions in Maryland.

Approximately 90 cattle are slaughtered per day at J. W. Treuth, and about 97% of those are choice cuts, according to Harry E. Springfield, Jr., a Field Safety and Occupational Health Specialist with ASD's Environmental Health and Safety Branch. "[J.W. Treuth] gets some of the best cattle in the country here," said Springfield.

After slaughter, the steer is split and all parts are inspected. Inspectors thoroughly check the cattle for defects and diseases. If any part of the steer is suspect, that part (or all parts) may be retained, and upon further veterinary disposition, the liver, muscle and kidney (LMK) samples from that animal may be sent to a pathology laboratory for assessment. A HACCP inspector is also on site at J. W. Treuth to ensure compliance with HACCP regulations.

Overall, the ASD employees who toured the slaughter and processing plants learned a great deal about the FSIS functions that they support. "Anyone who has an opportunity to experience the time in someone else's job that [they] support should take advantage of that opportunity," said Vikki Beaty of ASD's Procurement and Property Branch.

FSIS Award Winners

by Carol Seymour
Office of Field Operations
Telephone: 202-720-5643

On January 21, 2000, the United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida presented "The Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer Award" to FSIS Compliance Officers (CO) Carolyn A. Adornetto and Rebecca D. Gilreath at an Awards Ceremony in Miami, Florida. They received the awards for investigating and documenting cases for the adulteration and misbranding of meat and poultry products. The violations were written on Four Star Poultry & Provision Co., Inc., Custom Cold Storage, and Jacob Fleishman & Sons, Inc., and Preferred Freezer Services, Inc., all located in Miami area. CO Adornetto continues to provide enforcement coverage in Southern Florida, while CO Gilreath recently transferred to the Jackson, MS District.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Information for Survivors of Employees or Retirees

The Human Resources Field Office (HRFO) has been receiving questions regarding: how do my survivors apply for death benefits and is my family entitled to continuation of the health benefits if something happens to me?

Application for death benefits begins by completing specific forms. The proper forms for your elected benefits are obtained by calling the Human Resources Field Office (HRFO) on 1-800-370-3747. The specialists there will mail your survivors the appropriate forms, give them an estimate of the dollar amounts of the benefits payable and assist them in the completion of these forms.

If you are enrolled in the family option of a Federal Employees Health Benefits plan, your survivors will continue to be covered, with the Agency paying the same percentage of the premium they are currently paying.

In order to make applying for death benefits easier for your survivor(s) or beneficiaries, we have prepared a "tear out" form for you to give them (Attachment 1 to this month's issue of the *Beacon*). Your beneficiaries should note the information required and keep the HRFO toll free number handy. The Checklist can also be found under the Benefits Public Folder in Outlook. (Access All Public Folders, Personnel, Benefits) if you want to print additional copies. HRFO Benefit specialists are available to answer questions and give assistance to you and your family regarding your Federal benefits – don't hesitate to call on 1-800-370-3747.

Accumulated Leave is a Wise Investment (Commentary)

*by Dr. John Ramsburg,
Office of Field Operations
Harrisburg, VA*

Recently the stock market has been creating a lot of interest among people with retirement dreams and those that have saved enough to invest. While some people may feel that investing is only for those who have large sums to speculate with, the average family is getting involved more and more each year. Retirement funds, college savings plans, and inheritance monies are being invested into a variety of stock funds.

One very important principle of long-term capital growth is to start early and stay in for an extended period. This concept is also valid for regular (non-stock) savings such as U.S. Savings Bonds and life insurance plans. Small deposits, when added to regularly and allowed to work for long periods, can earn sizable returns for the patient investor. Ask a fellow employee who has been contributing regularly to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) for the past 10 years, what a regular, small investment can do. This same principle can apply to other Federal benefits such as accumulated annual and sick leave. Most employees view leave as a benefit of Federal employment but have not included it in their investment strategy or when evaluating their insurance needs, but they should.

Each employee receives a biweekly benefits statement (i.e., Form AD-334, Earnings and Leave Statement) that shows the accumulated dollar value of his/her leave. For employees who are fortunate to have good health and are wise enough to save their leave instead of spending it, the dollar amount can exceed a year's salary. Saving leave is the same as saving money. Each full time employee earns 104 hours of sick leave per leave year. If half of this leave were

saved annually for ten years, an employee would have accumulated 520 hours of sick leave or three months with full pay. If the same employee saved 240 hours of annual leave (the maximum limit per year for most employees) with 520 hours of sick leave over a 10-year period, his/her leave "portfolio" would be worth 760 hours or 19 weeks of full pay. This example is based on a modest biweekly investment compared to what many local inspection staff have achieved.

Although employees may not be paid for accrued sick leave when they leave the Federal service, there is still a huge incentive to conserving leave. For Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) employees, accrued sick leave may be counted towards service credit. For all employees, saving sick leave insures that they have a "leave cushion" to draw upon in the event of a medical crisis. This is very important since there is no other type of disability compensation for Federal employees who are out of work due to a medical emergency (except when it is job-related).

Everyone's situation is different and requires judgment on how leave should be saved or spent. Statistically, we are faced with greater health challenges as we grow older. The wise person will build up a good reserve early during healthy years that can be drawn upon later when age takes its inevitable toll. It is indeed sad to see someone suffer the double misfortune of failing health along with the lack of income due to an inadequate leave reserve.

"Time waits for no one." Large leave investments do not accumulate like a "bull market on Wall Street." But, instead, month by month, year by year, leave hours are invested or spent. Each decision has a short-term and long-term result. All of us have some control over our future by investing in accumulated leave today!

The Census Counts

The Census for the year 2000 is underway. Some of you may have already received your forms from the U. S. Census Bureau (USCB) and for others, they may be on the way to your home by mail, or via a census taker. You probably know the census is an official count of the number of people in the United States, based on responses to a census questionnaire, and is undertaken every ten years by the USCB, Department of Commerce. It is our Government's chief means of obtaining vital statistics on our country's population. The Census counts and works in many ways to help all of us, so it is important to answer the questions, and provide accurate information.

Census 2000 will be used in a number of ways including:

- decision-making at all levels of government
- reapportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives;
- drawing federal, state, and local legislative districts
- drawing school district boundaries
- budget planning for government at all levels
- the distribution of over \$100 billion in federal funds, and even more money in state funds
- forecasting future public transportation, housing, and health services needs
- planning health and educational services for people with disabilities
- developing adult education programs
- evidence in litigation involving land use, voting rights and equal opportunity
- locating factory sites and distribution centers
- investment planning and evaluation of financial risk
- attracting new businesses to state and local areas

The U.S. Census Bureau lists Five Big Reasons why you should fill out your Census Form. They are:

1. Help your community thrive. Census numbers can assist your community in developing public improvement strategies to address such problems as traffic congestion, elderly people who live alone, and over crowded schools.
2. Get help in times of need. Many 911 emergency systems are based on maps developed from the 1990 census. When there are floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, or other natural disasters, the census tells rescuers how many people in a particular block or area, will need their help.
3. Make Government work for you. The census statistics will help determine distribution of billions of dollars in federal and state funds for hospitals, schools, school nutrition programs, senior centers, highways, and stadiums.
4. Reduce Risk for American Business. Census numbers can help industry reduce financial risk and locate potential markets, so that businesses can predict and produce products that are needed.
5. Help yourself and your family. Although individual records are kept confidential for 72 years, a certificate can be requested from past censuses that can be used as proof of age, residence, or relationship. This information can help someone qualify for a pension, establish citizenship, or obtain an inheritance.

The Census Bureau is making an unprecedented outreach effort for Census 2000. The percentage of people who answered the census declined from 78% in 1970 to 65% in 1990, and that means many people were not counted, and were

missed altogether in gathering this essential information. As a citizen, and as a federal employee, you are urged to answer the census. Your participation will insure that you, your family, and your community are counted.

If you would like more information about Census 2000, you may contact one of the following Regional Census Centers across the country:

Atlanta (404-331-0573)
 Boston (617-424-4977)
 Charlotte (704-344-6624)
 Chicago (312-353-9759)
 Dallas (214-655-3060)
 Denver (303-231-5029)
 Detroit (248-967-9524)
 Kansas City (816-801-2020)
 Los Angeles (818-904-6522)
 New York City (202-620-7702 or 212-260-7703)
 Philadelphia (215-957-8312)
 Seattle (206-553-5882)

You may also find out more about the Census from the USCB's Internet site located at the following address: <http://www.census.gov>.

Child Support Enforcement Handbook

This is a reminder that The Handbook on Child Support Enforcement is available from Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch/Human Resources Division upon request. The handbook is published by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Department of Health and Human Services. The handbook contains a glossary of terms, as well as a list of State Child Enforcement Offices for all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the American Territories. The handbook addresses a number of important topics related to child support, including:

- How to apply for child support enforcement services

- How to search for the non-custodial parent
- Establishing fatherhood – Legalities of Paternity
- Establishing the support order: financial obligation
- Enforcing the support order
- Obtaining interstate cooperation across State Lines

The Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975, and is a Federal/State/local initiative to insure the collection of child support. The message the handbook conveys is strong and clear: parents have an obligation to their children and they cannot walk away from or ignore their financial obligation to their children. The goals of the program are "to ensure that children have the financial support of both their parents, to foster responsible behavior towards children, and to reduce welfare costs." The program functions in all States and territories, through the State/county Social Services Department, Attorney General's Office or Department of Revenue. States work with prosecuting attorneys, law enforcement agencies, and officials of family or domestic relations courts to implement the program at the local level.

State Child Support Programs can assist with: locating non-custodial parents, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing support orders, and collecting child support payments. Although programs may vary from State to State, they provide services to all parents who need guidance and assistance. Employees with concerns and questions regarding Child Care Enforcement can obtain a copy of the handbook from the Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch, HRD at the address below.

Editor's Note:

The FSIS Human Resources Division (HRD) have provided articles in this month's issue of the

Beacon (the article on Survivor Benefits and the U. S. Census) that are designed to provide information on family issues that may be of importance to you. The articles may relay information about you that your family may need to know or be about things happening Government-wide that influence services/programs your family may need or the articles may direct you to important resources that may help you deal with specific family concerns (such as past articles about child care and elder care resources).

HRD plans to bring these to you on a regular basis. Let them know if articles such as these are useful and informative. Please send your request for the Handbook on Child Support Enforcement or your comments to: Michele Clarke, Work Life Coordinator, Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch, Human Resources Division, Room 3817 South Building, 14th & Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700 or contact Michele via e-mail at Michele.Clarke@usda.gov or call 202-720-7983.

February/March Retirements

Jerry Barak, VMO, OFO, Gonzales, TX, 02/29/2000, 7 Years
Darrell L. Bower, SVMO, OFO, Carthage, MO, 02/25/2000, 8 Years
Patsy L. Bumgardner, FI, OFO, Stanley, VA, 02/26/2000, 9 Years
Donald R. Byrd, FI, OFO, Los Angeles, CA, 03/03/2000, 20 Years
Oress P. Chacon, Compliance Officer, OFO, Boulder, CO, 03/03/2000, 27 Years
Colin R. C. Collmann, FI, OFO, Sioux City, IA, 02/26/2000, 12 Years
George T. Escobar, SVMO, OFO, San Jose, CA, 03/03/2000, 31 Years
Herbert R. Gantz, Public Affairs Specialist, Washington, DC, 03/03/2000, 38 Years
Leon R. Harger, Consumer Safety Inspector, OFO, Grand Rapid, MI 02/26/2000, 29 Years

Maurice R. Jenkins, FI, OFO, De Funiak Springs, FL, 02/29/2000, 15 Years
John H. Miller, SVMO, OFO, Omaha, NE, 02/27/2000, 13 Years
Salvatore J. Naro, Consumer Safety Inspector, OFO, Old Forge, PA, 03/03/2000, 30 Years
William R. Noes, Consumer Safety Inspector, OFO, Harrison, OH, 02/26/2000, 35 Years
Donald E. O'Brien, SVMO, OFO, Perry, IA, 02/29/2000, 16 Years
Barbara S. Pierce, SVMO, OFO, Puyallup, WA, 03/03/2000, 25 Years
Pedro L. Ramos, SVMO, OFO, Wimauma, FL 02/25/2000, 34 Years
Jayne N. Turner, FI, OFO, Trussville, AL, 03/02/2000, 30 Years
Carey M. White, FI, OFO, Moselle, MS, 02/25/2000, 29 Years
Marvin L. Williams, Consumer Safety Inspector, OFO, Marshall, MN, 03/03/2000, 40 Years
Pamela G. Woodiwiss, FI, OFO, Monroe, NC, 02/26/2000, 6 Years

Leave Transfer Recipients

1. Jackie Copeland
OFO, DC; Illness
2. Annie Stewart
POB, MN; Serious Illness
3. Linda Cole
OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness
4. Sonya West
OPPDE, DC; Maternity
5. Joyce Schultz
POB, MN; Serious Illness
6. Stephanie Showell
OFO, DE; Family Illness
7. Michael Schwochert
OFO, CO; Surgery
8. Linda Carey
EMS, DC; Surgery
9. Nancy Clyburn
OPHS, DC; Surgery
10. George Olson
OFO, MN; Family Illness
11. Marilyn Weber
FPC, IA; Illness
12. Robert Martz
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
13. Betty Morgan
OFO, AR; Family Illness
14. Carolyn Woolfolk
OFO, DC; Surgery

15. OFO-99-0027*
OFO, NC; Surgery
16. Theresa Spoering
OFO, MN; Surgery
17. OFO-99-0034*
OFO, SD; Family Illness
18. Maureen Murphy
OFO, OK; Surgery
19. Tammy Love
OFO, AR; Surgery
20. Sue Engels
OFO, IA; Family Illness
21. Michael Craig
OFO, NE; Family Illness
22. Nicole Wareham
OFO, IN; Maternity
23. Michelle Long
OM, DC; Surgery
24. Glenda Snyders
OFO, KS; Surgery
25. Angela Cuello
OFO, TX; Serious Illness
26. Mona Eder
OFO, IL; Maternity
27. Aurbrey Tribble
OFO, FL; Serious Illness
28. Jacqueline Bonner
OFO, AL; Surgery
29. Denise Bassell
FPC, IA; Illness
30. John French
OFO, GA; Family Illness
31. Victor Varnadoe
OFO, OH; Family Illness
32. OFO-99-0049
OFO, MA; Surgery
33. Tommie Olson
OFO, NE; Surgery
34. Clement Grangier
OFO, MD; Serious Illness
35. OFO-99-0047*
OFO, IA; Surgery
36. Mark Spear
OFO, AL; Surgery
37. Dunita Harris
OFO, TX; Maternity
38. James Layman
OFO, OH; Serious Illness
39. Karen Wesson
OFO, DC; Surgery
40. Brandy Blevins
OFO, CA; Serious Illness
41. Vandora Hampton
OFO, VA; Serious Illness
42. OFO-00-0006*
OFO, AL; Illness
43. Madge Stone
OFO, DC; Family Illness
44. Carmen Torrent

- OM, DC; Illness
45. OFO-00-0007*
OFO, AL; Surgery

*While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers if they choose so that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

VDIP

Confidentiality

by Milo Christianson
Telephone: 612-370-2000
Kathy Welsh
Telephone: 202-720-5657
Labor and Employee Relations
Division

Confidentiality is a critical part of the Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program (VDIP). However, there has been some confusion surrounding what exactly is confidential in an intervention/mediation (intervention). Basically, if you tell the intervenor/mediator (intervenor) something in private and ask that it be kept private and confidential, the intervenor is bound by law not to disclose the information, unless all of the parties and the intervenor agree in writing to share it.

There are some obvious exceptions to this rule, but these are rare. For example, if someone confesses to criminal misconduct or to an act of fraud, waste, or abuse, or informs the intervenor that he/she plans to commit a violent physical act, the intervenor is required to share this information with appropriate authorities. If such confessions are made, the intervention is also terminated. Further, if a judge

determines that disclosure of a private, confidential discussion is necessary to prevent a *manifest injustice, establish a violation of law, or prevent harm to the public health or safety*, an intervenor *may* be required by a court to disclose a private discussion. However, this has never occurred in our program or in those programs in other agencies such as the Air Force, that have similar programs dating back to the early 1990s.

In addition, facts that are discoverable *before* an intervention session do not become confidential merely because they were presented *during* the intervention. It is only those things that a party says or writes in confidence to the intervenor during the intervention that cannot be disclosed, unless it is covered by one of the rare exceptions mentioned above.

Any agreement to participate in an intervention and any final agreement, particularly one involving an EEO complaint, are not completely confidential, since FSIS officials who were not present may need to review and approve any proposed agreement before it becomes binding on FSIS. Therefore, an EEO Settlement Agreement cannot be kept completely secret. Those who must approve it have a need to know what is in it, so the agreement must be shared with them. In addition, those who must ensure that the terms of the agreement are being carried out, have a need to know what is in the agreement.

There are also other instances when information concerning a case involving a bargaining unit member is shared with the appropriate Council President(s) of the National Joint Council of Food Inspector Locals and the appropriate Labor Relations Specialist(s) who works with those Presidents. The typical information shared includes the names of the employees involved in the conflict, the issues involved, and the location and date of the

intervention. Such information would be included in any agreement to participate in an intervention and, therefore, is *not* considered confidential.

Since the Council President(s) and appropriate Labor Relations Specialists must jointly decide, based on impact and implementation bargaining, if intervention is the most appropriate method to use to try to resolve a bargaining unit member's conflict, they need the information mentioned above to make an informed decision. Once the intervention is completed, the fact that an agreement is reached or not reached is also shared. However, the private conversations between the intervenor and the parties involved in the intervention are *not* shared.

In summary, the following are *not* confidential:

- Agreements to Participate in an Intervention. (Note: We have never released these in FSIS.)
- Settlement Agreements reached as a result of an intervention. (Note: The parties can arrange to limit the circulation of any settlement agreement, and other laws or regulations may provide additional confidentiality protections.)
- Evidence that is otherwise discoverable outside of the intervention.
- Any information necessary to prevent a manifest injustice, help establish a violation of law, or prevent harm to the public health or safety, *only as directed by a court.*
- Any confidential dispute resolution communication if the parties to the dispute and the intervenor *consent in writing.* (Note: If the confidential dispute resolution communication was provided by a nonparty participant, that individual must also agree in writing.)

Remember *exceptions* to confidentiality are extremely rare. In fact, Congress recognized that confidentiality is so essential to the success of any intervention that it exempted dispute resolution communications from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, at the end of every intervention, the intervenor rips up his/her notes in order to protect the confidentiality of the parties participating in the session.

For further information, you can review the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act of 1996.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Multi-District Safety Poster Contest (Atlanta, Jackson, Raleigh)

*by G. Ray Kobaly
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 404-562-5961*

The Multi-District Safety & Health Committee (Atlanta, Jackson, & Raleigh Districts) announces a Multi-District Safety Poster Contest and have decided on the theme for the contest should focus on safety ideas to prevent 'Slips, Trips and Falls' in the work areas in which they perform their duties.

Multi-District Safety Contest Procedures:

Entries are to be in black and white, completely hand-drawn, and on 8 1/2 X 11 plain bond paper. Entrants must be permanent full-time employees of the Atlanta, Jackson, or Raleigh Districts, Field Operations, FSIS. Entries are limited to one submittal per employee and must be received at the address listed below by the close of business June 1, 2000. The employee's Name, District and Circuit should appear on the back of the poster.

Send your poster to:
G. Ray Kobaly, Safety and Health Specialist
USDA, FSIS, ASD, EHSB
100 Alabama Street, SW
1924 Building, Suite 3R90
Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3104

The Multi-District Safety and Health Committee will select one winning poster from each district's entries during the Committee's meeting in July 2000. Each winner must be on the roles at the time selections are made and will be presented with an eight hour time-off award and certificate from the District Manager or his representative. A copy of their poster will be featured in a later edition of the *Beacon*.

Occupational Safety and Health Questionnaire Update

*by Betsy Kogan
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4250*

On March 10, 2000, an Occupational Safety and Health Questionnaire was mailed to the Senior FSIS Officials-In-Charge in all meat, poultry, and egg product establishments. One correction to the questionnaire needs to be noted. Question 10a refers to FSIS Form 4791-24 and -25. The later form should be listed as 4791-23. Also, many requests have been made for the USDA Safety and Health Poster, AD-1010, which is referenced in Question 2. This form is no longer available and will be replaced in the near future with an FSIS Safety and Health Poster, which will be directly mailed to each establishment. The March 2000 edition of the *Beacon* provides more information on the new poster. If you need any additional information on the questionnaire, please contact me at the above telephone number or on e-mail.

TRAVEL

Unmatched Visa Travel Accounts*by Sue Ayers**Budget Division**Telephone: 202-720-5068*

Bank of America (BOA) has advised the Department that they have approximately 700 Visa accounts for the travel charge card that are unmatched with the cardholders' agency. These are "active" accounts with charges being made by the cardholders and payments being received by BOA. It is imperative that these accounts be matched with their agency as soon as possible. To resolve this problem, BOA will soon be sending out letters to those cardholders advising them to contact their agency's travel office immediately. If any FSIS employees receive one of the letters, they must contact their resource management staff or administrative staff so their accounts can be promptly located under FSIS. If this is not done, *their accounts will be closed.*

Reoccurring Travel Questions

- Q. Are money order fees purchased in connection with official travel reimbursable?
- A. YES! They are claimed on the travel voucher under Miscellaneous Expenses.
- Q. Are transaction fees incurred for authorized withdrawals from automated teller machine's (ATM's) reimbursable?
- A. YES! They are also claimed on the travel voucher under Miscellaneous Expenses.
- Q. Can postage stamp fees used (1) for filing travel vouchers and (2) for mailing payments to the contractor of the Government-sponsored travel charge card be claimed on the travel vouchers?
- A. NO! Federal employees *who have performed official travel and received per diem have*

already received reimbursements for these fees in the \$2 incidental-expense allocation provided under the M&IE portion of their per diem rates. For example, with a per diem rate that allows a \$34 M&IE allocation, the breakdown would be \$7 for breakfast, \$7 for lunch, \$18 for dinner, and \$2 for incidental expenses.

(Note: This is a recent change in the Federal Travel Regulation, Chapter 300, Part 3.1, Per diem allowance, (c) Incidental expenses (4) Mailing cost.

- Q. Are there provisions for compensation of those same postage fees for employees vouchering for travel expenses that did not involve any M&IE expenses; e.g., monthly mileage reimbursement vouchers?
- A. YES! They may use official Government "penalty" envelopes.
- Q. Can official USDA postage or USDA penalty-envelopes be used for filing travel vouchers or for mailing payments to the contractor of the Government-sponsored travel charge card.
- A. NO! They are only for the use of conducting official Government business. (The traveler has received payment for the mailing fees through the \$2 incidental-expense allocation.)
- Q. What must I do if an incorrect charge is put on my official travel card?
- A. As a cardholder, you are responsible for contacting the contractor (Bank of America—BOA) for filing a "dispute" claim. You may begin this process by using the document provided in your monthly statement, if this coincides, or by contacting BOA on 1-800-472-1424. Regardless, BOA must have your signature on a "dispute" claim before contacting the

merchant where the erroneous charge occurred. Erroneous charges *properly put in dispute* will not become delinquent, and, therefore, will not cause an account to be suspended, cancelled, or incur any late fees.

- Q. If a portion of an official ticket reservation was not used because a change was made in the return flight, what must be done with the unused portion?
- A. It must be returned to the travel management center (TMC) that issued the ticket. (For Headquarters, that is currently the American Express travel agency. This return would be done through the Fiscal Services Branch that manages the Agency's official travel through the TMC.) The traveler should maintain a copy of the unused portion of the ticket along with the other receipts for that official travel. It may take several months before the airline credit is posted to the cardholder's account. The cardholder should verify that the TMC has properly processed the unused ticket for a credit from the airlines. Also, the cardholder should contact BOA to advise them of the pending credit and have the charge amount (possibly, an approximate amount) put in dispute.

Fees to be Paid for Late Reimbursement of Travel Vouchers*by Janice Carpenter**Budget Division**Telephone: 202-720-6756*

The General Service Administration has recently issued Amendment 90 to the Federal Travel Regulation effective for all travel performed after February 29, 2000. After that date, agencies will be required to reimburse travelers within 30 calendar days after submission of a proper travel voucher to the appropriate approving official. If travelers are not reimbursed within

this 30-day period, late payment fees will be calculated using the prevailing Prompt Payment Act Interest Rate. Late payment fees will be paid to the traveler beginning on the 31st day after submission of a proper travel claim and ending the date on which payment is made. The late payment fee will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service as interest income. This fee will only be paid when the computed fee is \$1.00 or greater.

The amendment also requires that agencies notify travelers within 7 days to explain any error in the voucher that would prevent reimbursement within 30 days.

In order to accommodate the requirements of Amendment 90, the National Finance Center is making a change in the use of Block 52, Date Approved, on the AD-616, Travel Voucher (Temporary Duty), and Block 58, Date Approved, on the AD-616R, Travel Voucher (Relocation). Approving officials should immediately begin indicating the date of voucher receipt in the Date Approved fields. The date of receipt will be stored in the Travel System (TRVL) and will be the key in determining if late payments are due to travelers. The forms will be updated in the future to show the new block designations. Please note that PC-TRVL and online TRVL users should follow these same instructions when electronically entering travel vouchers.

And While We're on the Subject of Travel Vouchers...

by Barbara McNiff

Budget Division

Telephone: 202-720-3061

Section 301-52.7 of The Federal Travel Regulations states that employees must submit travel claims within 5 working days after the completion of a trip or period of travel, or every 30 days if you are on continuous travel status. (Directive 3810.3 states that employees should submit their vouchers promptly.) Some of our

employees continue to delay the submission of their vouchers for several months or, in some cases, for several years, before presenting them for payment. Under NFC's automated travel system an authorization has only a limited life span, at the end of which it expires. When a voucher is presented for payment after the authorization expires, a new authorization must be issued and transmitted. As we pointed out in an article in the June 1999 the *Beacon*, this causes additional work for the District office and the Financial Processing Center, and makes it very difficult for managers to budget properly if they have outstanding obligations of which they are unaware.

In the future, cases involving employees who delay the submission of their travel vouchers for extended periods of time will be referred to the Labor and Employees Relations Branch for consideration of possible disciplinary action.

OCONUS Rates

The Department of Defense which is responsible for establishing the per diem rates for Outside the Continental United States (e.g. Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii, etc.) has changed its policy on OCONUS rates to match domestic rate policy established by GSA, i.e. room taxes will no longer be included in the rate and should be claimed as a miscellaneous expense. State Department has made no similar announcement concerning foreign per diem rates.

SUPPLIES

Export Stamps

by Pete Bridgeman

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4222

We recently placed an order for the "Dormy All Square 2" Export Stamps, the style we have been

using for the past year, and found that the production of these stamps will be delayed for a couple of months. In the interim, we have ordered some Superior Export Stamps, to ensure we do not run out of stock while we wait for the Dormy's to be manufactured and delivered. When we do receive the Dormy's, they will be slightly different in appearance, but will be the same basic stamp. The main difference will be that the body of the stamp, formerly solid metal, will now be metal with 4 slots on either side. Other than that, it will be the same basic stamp we have been using.

Dormy is no longer manufacturing the solid body stamp. We will appreciate any feedback field users can provide to us, as you obtain and begin to use the new style of Dormy stamp. We want to ensure that it retains the same quality on the job that the current stamp has. If you experience any problems with the new stamp that you didn't encounter with the old one, we'll need to know about it.

You can either e-mail me with your feedback on Outlook or through the internet (peter.bridgeman@usda.gov), call the toll free supply hot line (1-800-714-8335) with your feedback, fax it to 301-504-4231, or mail it in to USDA, FSIS, 5601 Sunnyside Ave. - 2L-179, Beltsville, MD 20705-5230. This will be helpful towards ensuring that we are providing you with the best stamp within reasonable cost that we can provide.

Egg Products Tanker Seals

We are close to making a decision on the replacement of the Plastic Tanker Seals with a type of cable seal that will provide better integrity, while being safe and easy to handle. We are looking at a couple of different types of self-locking cable seals, with 1/16" thick, 11" long cables. They are currently being field-tested, and upon the results of that test, a final decision will be

made, the new seals will be ordered, and within the next month or two should be available to order from Landover. As soon as we get these in, we will announce it in the Beacon, and a notification will be sent out to the field, as well.

D-Cell Batteries - Unit of Issue Change

D-Cell Batteries, Item Number 876, will now come in a unit of issue of PK4, (package of 4), instead of EA (each). Please mark this change in your catalog.

Problems with Back Orders

A lot of the bugs have finally been worked out of the new system at Landover. We know that the period between October 1999, and February 2000 has been a very difficult one for obtaining supplies, forms and specialty items from Landover. Orders were lost; wrong items were sent; some inspectors received other inspectors' supply orders; some people received orders meant for other agencies; backorders did not get sent out when the items came in; emergency orders did not go out when they were supposed to; most orders took a long time to get filled; and, all of this created many more emergencies than normally occur. This has been the worst period of performance we have experienced since we entered into the agreement with the Office of Operations at Landover to perform our Field Supply System function 4 years ago. While they do finally seem to be filling orders on the same day they are received, we are still getting reports of a number of mistakes being made on orders. We are doing everything in our power to remedy these problems and to hold Landover accountable for them. Please call the toll-free supply hot line to report any problems with orders so we can try to fix them.

One problem in the implementation of the new system that is just now

getting remedied is the procedure for sending out back-ordered items. They apparently had a glitch in the system, where Pick Tickets were not getting printed out when the items came into stock. They tried to remedy this manually, but apparently had some problems there, and a lot of back-orders did not go out. This has now been straightened out, and most back-ordered items from this period should now have been filled. If you have been waiting for a back-ordered item for more than 2 months, you should re-order the item(s).

When Is Landover Moving?

We reported last year that the Landover Service Center was scheduled to be moving to Beltsville sometime in the Spring of this year. This move is still scheduled to occur, but it now appears to be planned for sometime around September of this year. In the meantime, as agency costs associated with the storage and distribution of forms and supplies at Landover have risen dramatically in the past 2 years, and as the quality of service has declined just as dramatically in recent months, we have been exploring other options to Landover for handling our Field Supply System function. We are currently looking at a proposal from an agency of the President's Committee for the Blind and Severely Disabled (NIB) contractor, and considering contracting the Field Supply System out to them. If this occurs, the new operation would be established in Upper Marlboro, MD, later this year. A decision on this will be made prior to Landover's move to Beltsville in September. The proposal from NIB features electronic ordering capability for our field, along with the options of placing orders via phone or fax, and also includes an e-commerce option for supply items (all supply items on an order would go automatically to a local office supply store, electronically, and be filled and sent out the next day). We are excited

about these possibilities, as they will be improvements to the quality of the Field Supply System, and will help to achieve our goal of making the Field Supply System as customer friendly and comparable in quality as an L.L.Bean-type of operation.

ISSUANCES

Recent Agency Issuances

by Corinne Calhoun

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4233

The following notice has been issued since the March 2000 edition of The Beacon. Many recent issuances are available in an electronic format from the "PCDIALS" library in Opendesk and from the "Agency Issuances" public folder in the Exchange mail system (Outlook).

Notice 5-00 (2/23/00)

Misuse of the Government-Provided Electronic Mail and Internet Systems

Directives and notices are distributed automatically to applicable Agency employees and offices. Additional copies are available from:

USDA FSIS ASD P&DS
MAILDROP 5241
5601 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE
BELTSVILLE MD 20705-5241

Tel: 301-504-4242

Fax: 301-504-4277

VEHICLES

Reimbursement for Gas Purchases

by Pete Bridgeman

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4222

If a U.S. Government Fleet Services credit card is lost or stolen, your servicing Fleet Management Center

(FMC) should be notified immediately, first by telephone and then in writing. Your letter should contain the following information:

- Tag number of the vehicle for which the credit card was issued.
- The date and location where the credit card was last seen.
- The location where the credit card was used last.
- The steps you took to recover the lost or stolen card.

While you are awaiting your replacement card, any required gasoline purchases should be documented on an SF-1164 and sent, along with the receipt, to *this office** for reimbursement.

Note: This is a change in the procedure. Previously you were instructed to send these in to GSA for reimbursement. However, GSA is no longer going to process these claims.

We will process the SF-1164 and issue a check to the driver. We will then provide GSA with the information and our agency will be credited by GSA on our next interagency billing statement.

* Send to:

USDA, FSIS, ASD - ATTN: Brian McNiff
5601 Sunnyside Ave - 2L-190D
Beltsville, MD 20705-5230

Proof of Insurance for Operators of Government Vehicles

by Brian McNiff

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4221

The U.S. Government is self-insured and no insurance identification number is required. All drivers of Government vehicles are covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C. 2679, which provides that remedy by suit against the U.S. is exclusive, and the employee may not be sued personally. The Federal Tort Claims Act protects the employee when damages to property or injury results from operation by the employee of a motor vehicle while acting within the scope of his official duties.

All claims and reports of accidents are to be forwarded to the following address:

USDA, FSIS, ASD, PPMVSS
Attn: Brian McNiff (2-L190D)
5601 Sunnyside Ave.
Beltsville, MD. 20705-5230

Tel: 301-504-4221
Tollfree: 1-800-714-8335

Claims for property damage and personal injury are to be submitted on a Standard Form 95 (Claim for Damage, Injury, Or Death). This form is available by calling one of the above phone numbers.

Every government vehicle driver should keep a copy of Standard Form 95 Claim for Damage, Injury or Death) in the vehicle assigned to them at all times. The other driver involved in an accident with a government vehicle is required to complete the SF-95, if they wish to file a Tort Claim.

To comment on this newsletter or to submit an article for publication, please contact:

Kevin Dressman
Editor, *The Beacon*
USDA, FSIS, OM
Mail Drop 5250
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
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The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically on the FSIS OpenDesk and Exchange mail systems as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

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ATTACHMENT 1

Survivor Benefit Checklist

Tear out this checklist and leave it with your spouse and/or beneficiary

**Reporting the Death of an Employee
(at your earliest convenience)**

- ☐ Call the supervisor or the District Office at _____
- ☐ Call the Benefits and Workers Compensation Section of the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747

Provide the following information:

- Name of Employee _____
- Social Security Number _____
- Date of Death _____
- Cause of Death _____
- Names and ages of minor children _____

-Former spouses Yes _____ No _____

- Your name (if you are not the surviving spouse), or name of spouse
 - Your relationship to the deceased
 - Your address
 - Your telephone #
-

The HRFO will provide the survivor(s) with death benefit forms and a letter of instructions. The forms will indicate if the employee had:

- Life Insurance
- Health Insurance
- Thrift Savings Plan
- Unpaid Compensation (salary, travel reimbursement and/or annual leave)

Reporting the Death of a Retiree

-You may call OPM toll free on 1-888-767-6738
(the number is a voice activated response system that is operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

or

-You may call the HRFO on 1-800-370-3747
(they will forward your request for death benefits to OPM)

Listing of Phone Numbers and Address for Beneficiaries

(Use these numbers to check the status of benefits after the forms have been processed)

Current Employee

USDA:FSIS:HRFO
Butler Square West, 4th Floor
100 North 6th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403

Tel: 1-800-370-3747

Retiree

Office of Personnel Management
Employee Service & Records Center
Boyers, PA 16017

1-888-767-6738 or
202-606-0500

Thrift Saving Plan Office
National Finance Center
P.O. Box 61135
New Orleans, LA 70161

Telephone: 504-255-6000

ATTACHMENT 2

**C, F, and G Fund Monthly Returns
March 8, 2000⁺**

Months	C Fund	S&P 500 Stock Index	F Fund	Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate Bond Index	G Fund
1995 (Jan. - Dec.)	37.41%	37.58%	18.31%	18.47%	7.03%
1996 (Jan. - Dec.)	22.85%	22.96%	3.66%	3.63%	6.76%
1997 (Jan. - Dec.)	33.17%	33.36%	9.60%	9.65%	6.77%
1998 (Jan. - Dec.)	28.44%	28.58%	8.70%	8.69%	5.74%
1999 (Jan. - Dec.)	20.95%	21.04%	(0.85%)	(0.82%)	5.99%
1999	%	%	%	%	%
March	3.99	4.00	.54	.55	.47
April	3.86	3.87	.29	.32	.46
May	(2.36)	(2.36)	(0.89)	(0.88)	.47
June	5.54	5.55	(0.33)	(0.32)	.49
July	(3.14)	(3.12)	(0.43)	(0.42)	.52
August	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.05)	(0.05)	.53
September	(2.78)	(2.74)	1.15	1.16	.51
October	6.34	6.33	.38	.37	.53
November	2.00	2.03	(0.01)	(0.01)	.51
December	5.90	5.89	(0.45)	(0.48)	.54
2000					
January	(5.03)	(5.02)	(0.34)	(0.33)	.56
February	(1.93)	(1.89)	1.22	1.21	.53
Last 12 Months *	11.57	11.73	1.07	1.11	6.29

Percentages in () are negative.

The C Fund is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund which tracks the S&P 500 stock index. The F Fund is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund which tracks the Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate bond index. The G Fund is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities.

The monthly C, F, and G Fund returns represent net earnings for the month, after deduction of accrued administrative expenses. The C and F Fund returns also reflect the deduction of trading costs and accrued investment management fees.

The C, F, and G Fund monthly returns are dollar-weighted: they reflect net earnings on the changing balances invested during the month.

*** The C, F, and G Fund returns for the last twelve months assume, except for the crediting of earnings, unchanging balances (time-weighting) from month to month and assume earnings are compounded on a monthly basis.**

The C and F Fund returns vary from the index returns because of C and F Fund expenses, changing balances in the C and F Funds, and differences in returns between the Barclays funds and the underlying indexes. The index returns are time-weighted: they assume constant dollar balances invested during each month and throughout the period.

Future performance of the three funds will vary and may be significantly different from the returns shown above. See the "Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan" for detailed information about the funds and their investment risks.

⁺ This information is reprinted from last month's edition of the Beacon. Updated returns were not available at time of printing.